A

DISCOURSE

CONCERNING

Conſcience;

WHEREIN

An Account is given of the *Nature*, and *Rule*, and *Obligation*, of it.

AND

The Caſe of thoſe who Separate from the Communion of the *Church of England* as by Law Eſtabliſhed, upon this Pretence, that it is *Againſt their Conſcience* to joyn in it, is ſtated and diſcuſſed.

LONDON,

Printed for *Fincham Gardiner* at the *White-Horſe* in *Ludgate-Street*. 1684.

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Printed for *Pinchorn Gardiner* at the *White-Horſe* in *Ludgate-Street*. 1689.

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OF

CONSCIENCE:

With Reſpect to thoſe that Separate from the *Communion* of the *Church of England* upon the Pretence of it, &c.

THere is nothing more in our Mouths than *Conſcience*; and yet there are few things we have generally taken leſs Pains to underſtand. We ſit down too often with this, that it is ſomething *within us*, we do not know what, which we are to Obey in all that it Suggeſts to us, and we trouble our ſelves no further about it.

By which means, it frequently comes to paſs; that though we have eſpouſed very dangerous Errors, or happen to be ingaged in very Sinful Practices; yet believing, and Acting, as we ſay, according to our Conſcience; we do not only think our ſelves perfectly Right and Safe, while we continue in this State; but are Effectually Armed againſt all ſorts of Arguments, and Endeavours that can be uſed for the bringing us to a better Mind.

This is too Viſible in many Caſes; but in none more than in the Caſe of thoſe that at this Day Sepa-

rate from the *Communion* of *the Church* as it is Eſtabliſhed among us. Though the Laws of the Land both *Eccleſiaſtical*, and *Civil*, do oblige them to joyn in our Communion; though many Arguments are offer'd to convince them, not only that they Lawfully may, but that they are bound to do it: though they themſelves are ſenſible, that many-fold, and grievous miſchiefs, and dangers, do enſue from this breach of Communion, and theſe unnatural Diviſions, both to the *Chriſtian Religion* in General, and to our *Reformed Religion* in particular, yet if to all theſe things, a Man can reply, that he is *Satisfied* in his *Conſcience* that he doth well in refuſing his Obedience to the Laws; or that he is *not ſatisfied in his Conſcience* that he ought to joyn with us upon ſuch Terms as are required; this ſingle pretence ſhall be often thought a ſufficient Anſwer, both to Laws, and Arguments.

A ſtrange thing this is; that *Conſcience*, which among other ends, was given to Mankind for a Preſervative, and Security of the Publick Peace; for the more Effectually Obliging Men to Unity, and Obedience to Laws; yet ſhould often be a means of ſetting them at diſtance, and prove a Shelter for Diſobedience, and Diſorder: That God ſhould Command us to Obey our Governours in all Lawful things for Conſcience ſake, and yet that we ſhould Diſobey them in Lawful things for Conſcience ſake too.

It is the Deſign of this Diſcourſe to examine what there is in this Plea, that is ſo often made by our Diſſenters for their not complying with the Laws, *viz. That it is againſt their Conſcience ſo to do*; and to ſhew in what Caſes this Plea is juſtly made, and in what Caſes not; and where it is Juſtly made, how far it will Juſtify any Mans Separation, and how far it will not. And all this in order to the poſſeſſing thoſe who

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are concerned, with a Senſe of the great Neceſſity that lyes upon them, of uſing their moſt ſerious endeavours to inform their Conſcience aright in theſe matters, before they preſume to think they can Separate from us with a *good Conſcience*, which is all we deſire of them; for it is not our buſineſs to perſwade any Man to conform againſt his Conſcience; but to convince every Man how Dangerous it *may be to follow a miſinformed Conſcience.*

But before I enter upon this diſquiſition, it will be neceſſary in the firſt Place, to prepare my way by laying down the Grounds, and Principles, I mean to proceed upon. And here that I may take in all things, that are needful to be known before-hand, about this matter, I ſhall treat diſtinctly of theſe Five Heads.

1 Of the *Nature of Conſcience.*

2 Of the *Rule of Conſcience.* And under that,

3 Of the *Power of Humane Laws to Oblige the Conſcience.*

4 And particularly in *the inſtance of Church Communion.*

5 Of the *Authority of Conſcience*; or *how far a Man is Obliged to be guided by his Conſcience in his Actions.*

I. And firſt, as for the *Nature* of Conſcience, the trueſt way to find out that will be, not ſo much to enquire into the Signification of the word *Conſcience* or the ſeveral *Scholaſtical* Definitions of it; as to conſider what every Man doth really mean by that word when he has occaſion to make uſe of it; for if it do appear that all Men do agree in their Notions, and Senſe, about this matter; That without doubt, which they all thus agree in, is the true Notion, and Senſe of *Conſcience.*

Now as to this, we may obſerve in the firſt Place, that a Man never ſpeaks of his *Conſcience*, but with

reſpect to *his own Actions*, or to ſomething that hath the Nature of an Action which is done or omitted by him, or is to be done or omitted, Matters of *meer Knowledg*, and Speculation, we do not concern our Conſcience with; as neither with thoſe things in which we are *purely Paſſive*; as neither with *Actions*, if they be not *our own*. We do not for inſtance, make it a Point of Conſcience one way or other, whether a thing be true or falſe; or whether this or the other Accident that befals us, be proſperous or unfortunate; or whether another Man hath done good or bad Actions, in which we are no way concerned. Theſe kind of things may indeed prove matters of great Satisfaction or Diſquiet; of Joy or Grief to us: But we do not take our *Conſcience* to be affected with them. That word never comes in, but with reſpect to ſomething willingly done or left undone by us; or which we may do or may forbear.

Secondly, we may obſerve that in Common Speech, we do not neither uſe this word Conſcience about our Actions, but only, ſo far as thoſe Actions fall under a *Moral* conſideration; that is, as they have the Nature of *Duties* or *Sins*, or as they are *Lawful* or *Unlawful*. Always when we ſpeak of Conſcience in our Actions, we have reſpect to ſome *Law* or *Rule*, by which thoſe Actions are to be directed, and govern'd, and by their agreeableneſs or diſagreeableneſs with which they become morally *Good* or *Evil*.

Thirdly, this being ſo; the only thing remaining to be enquired into for the finding out what Conſcience is, is, what can be reaſonably thought to be our Senſe, and meaning, when we uſe the word *Conſcience*, with ſuch Application to our *Actions* as we have now ſaid. Now for that I deſire it may be conſidered; that when we talk of our *Actions* as we concern our Conſcience

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in them, they can but fall under these two Heads of Distinction, that is to say, in the first place, we either consider our Actions as *already done or omitted*: or we consider them as *yet not done, but as we are deliberating about them.* And then Secondly, whether we consider them as done or not done; as past, or future; yet we Rank them under one of these three Notions.

We either look upon them as *Commanded* by *God*, and so to be *Duties*; or as *forbidden* by *God*, and so to be Sins; or as *neither Commanded nor forbidden*, and so to be *indifferent* Actions. (With these last Actions indeed Conscience is not properly or directly concerned, but only by accident, to wit, as those indifferent *Actions* do approach to the Nature of Duties or Sins:) Our Actions, I say, do not touch our Conscience, but as they fall under some of these Heads.

Now in all these Respects we have indeed different ways of bringing in Conscience but yet as it will appear, we mean the same thing by it in them all. First of all when we are considering an Action *as yet not done*; if we look upon it as *Commanded* by God, we say we are *bound in Conscience* to do it; if we look upon it as a *Sinful* Action, we say it is *against our Conscience* to do it; if we look upon it as an *indifferent* thing, we say we may do it or not do it with a *Safe Conscience.* Now I pray, what do we mean by these expressions? I desire that every one would consult his own Mind, and deny if he can, that this is the Sense of his words. If he saith he is *bound in Conscience* to do this or the other thing, whether he doth not mean this? that he verily thinks it is his Duty to do that Action. If he saith that it is *against his Conscience* to do such an Action; whether he means any more than this? that he is perswaded in his Judgment that to do such an Action is an Offence against God. If he saith

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that he can do it with a *Safe Conſcience* whether he hath any other meaning than this? that to the beſt of his Knowledg, and Judgment, the Action may be done without Tranſgreſſing any Law of God. This is now undeniably, the Senſe that every Man in the World hath, when he makes mention of Conſcience as to Actions that are not yet done, but only propoſed to his Conſideration. So that taking Conſcience as it reſpects our *Actions* to be done or omitted, and as it is to Govern, and Conduct them (in which Senſe we call Conſcience a Guide or a Monitor, and ſometimes, though very improperly, a *Rule* of our Actions) it can be nothing elſe in the Senſe of all Men that uſe that word, but a Mans Judgment concerning the goodneſs or badneſs; the Lawfulneſs or Unlawfulneſs of Actions in order to the Conduct of his own Life.

But Secondly if we ſpeak of our Actions that are done and paſt, and conſider Conſcience with Reference to them; here indeed we do a little vary the Expreſſion about Conſcience, but the Notion of it is the ſame we have now given. As for inſtance, when we talk of *Peace of Conſcience*, or *Trouble of Conſcience*, with Reference to ſome Action we have done or omitted; when we ſay *My Conſcience bears me Witneſs*, that I have Acted rightly, and honeſtly in this Affair; or my Conſcience acquits me from blame, as to this or the other Action, or I am troubled in Conſcience for doing what I have done: If we turn theſe Phraſes into other words, we ſhall find that there is nothing more at the bottom of them than this; that reflecting upon our own Actions, we find that in this or the other inſtance, we have either Acted or omitted, as we are convinced in our Judgment we ought to do; and the remembrance of this is ſome Pleaſure, and Satisfaction to us: or we have done or forborn ſomething

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contrary to what we take to be our Duty; and the remembrance of this affects us with grief and trouble. But ſtill, in both theſe inſtances of Expreſſion, that which we mean by Conſcience is the ſame thing, as in the former Caſes, *viz. It is our Judgment and Perſwaſion concerning what we ought to do, or ought not to do, or Lawfully may do*; only here we add to it this Conſideration, that the Action which we are perſwaded to be good, or bad, or indifferent, is now done or omitted by us, and we do remember it. In the Former Caſe, Conſcience was conſidered as the Guide of our Actions. In the latter Caſe it is conſidered as the Witneſs of our Actions. But in both Caſes, Conſcience is the Judge, and conſequently in both Caſes the Notion of it is the ſame, only with this difference, that in the former it was a Mans mind, making a Judgment what he ought to do or not to do; in the latter it is a Mans mind reflecting upon what he hath done or not done, and Judging whether he be Innocent or Culpable in the matter he reflects upon.

I do not know how to give a clearer account of the Nature of Conſcience in general than this I have now given. This I believe is the Natural Notion that all Men have of it, and there is no Expreſſion in Scripture about it but what doth confirm this Notion. If indeed we put Epithites to Conſcience, and talk of a Good Conſcience or an Evil Conſcience; A Tender Conſcience or a Seared Conſcience or the like. Then it includes more, both in Scripture, and in Common Language, than I have now mentioned. But to give an account of thoſe things I am not now concerned, as being without the Limits of our preſent enquiry.

II. And now we are ſufficiently prepared for our Second general Point which is touching the *Rule of Conſcience*;

ſcience; if indeed after what we have already ſaid it be not ſuperfluous to inſiſt upon that.

It appears plainly by what I have repreſented, that Conſcience muſt always have a *Rule* which it is to follow, and by which it is to be Govern'd. For ſince Conſcience is nothing elſe but a Mans *Judgment* concerning *Actions, as good, or bad, or Indifferent*; it is certain that a Man muſt have ſome meaſures to proceed by in order to the framing ſuch a Judgment about Actions; that is to ſay, there muſt be ſomething diſtinct from the Man himſelf that makes Actions to be good, or bad, or indifferent; and from which, by applying particular Actions to it, or comparing them with it, a Man may be able to Judge whether they be of the one ſort or the other. Now this, whatever it be, is that which we call the Rule of Conſcience; and ſo much it is its Rule, that *Conſcience* can be no farther a ſafe guide than as it follows that Rule.

If now it be asked what this Rule of Conſcience is, or what that is which makes a difference between Actions, as to the Moral goodneſs or badneſs of them; the Anſwer to it is Obvious to every Body: That it can be nothing elſe but the *Law of God*. For nothing can be a *Duty* but what Gods Law hath made ſo; and nothing can be a *Sin* but what Gods Law hath forbidden (the very Notion of Sin being, that it is a Tranſgreſſion of the Law;) and laſtly we call a thing *Lawful* or *Indifferent* upon this very account, that there is no Law of God either Commanding or Forbidding it; and where there is no Law, there is no Tranſgreſſion. So that undeniably the great, nay I ſay, the only Rule by which Conſcience is to be Governed is the *Law of God, conſidered either as it Commands Actions, or Forbids them, or as it neither Commands them nor Forbids them.*

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But in order to the giving a more distinct account, of this *Rule of Conscience*, there is this needful to be enquired into, *viz.* In what Sense we take, or what we mean by the *Law of God*; when we say it is the *Rule of Conscience*.

Now to this our Answer is, That by the *Law* of God, we here understand Gods Will, for the Government of Mens Actions, in what way soever that Will is declared to them.

Now the will of God is declared to Men two ways; either by *Nature*, or by *Revelation*; so that the just, and adequate Rule of Conscience is made up of two parts the *Law of Nature*, and *Gods Revealed Law*.

By the *Law of Nature*, we mean those Principles of Good and Evil, Just and Unjust, which God hath Stamp'd upon the Minds of all Men, in the very Constitution of their Natures. There are some things Eternally good in themselves; Such as to Worship God, to Honour our Parents, to stand to our Covenants, to Live Peaceably in the Government, from which we receive Protection; and the contrary to these will be Eternally Evil; the Heads of all which things thus good in themselves, are writ so plainly, and *Legibly*, in the Minds of Mankind, that there is no Man who is come to the use of his Reason, but must of necessity be convinced, that to Practice these things will alway be his Duty, and not to Practice them, will always be Evil, and a Sin. Now all these Heads, and Principles put together, is that we call the *Law of Nature*, and this is all the Rule of Conscience, that Mankind had, before God was pleased to discover his Will by more particular *Revelation*. And this is that Law, which the Apostle speaks of when he saith *that the Gentiles, who had not the Law of* Moses *yet had a Law written in their Hearts*; by their Acting according to

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which, or contrary to which *their Conscience did bear Witness to them*, and did either *Accuse* them, or *Excuse* them.

But then Secondly, to us *Christians*, God to this *Law of Nature* hath superadded a *Revealed Law*, which is contained in the Books of Holy Scriptures. Which Revealed Law yet, is not wholly of a different kind from the former, nor doth it at all void the Obligation of it. But only thus; God hath in his Revealed Law, declared the Precepts of the Law of Nature, more certainly, and accurately than before; He hath given greater Force, and Strength to them, than they had before, by the Sanctions of greater Rewards, and Punishments: He hath likewise herein perfected the Law of Nature, and hath Obliged us, in point of Duty, to more and higher Instances of Vertue, than Nature did strictly Oblige us to: And Lastly, He hath added some Positive Laws for us to observe which were not at all contained in the Law of Nature, as for instance, to believe in *Jesus Christ*, in order to Salvation, to make all our Applications to God, in the Name of that Mediatour *Christ Jesus*; to enter into a *Christian Society*, by *Baptism*, and to Exercise *Communion* with that Society, by partaking of the *Lords Supper*.

And this is that Law, which we *Christians* are Obliged to, as well as to the Law of our Natures, and which as it is a Summary of all the Laws of Nature, so indeed is it a Summary of all our Duty. So that if any Man will call it the great, or only *Rule* of *Christian Conscience*, I shall not much oppose him, provided that this be always Remembred, that,

In the Third Place, when we say that the *Natural* and *Revealed* Law of God, is the just *Rule*, by which we are to Govern our Conscience, or when we say that the Law of God, as Revealed, and contained in the Bible, is to us Christians, the *just Rule*. We are so

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to understand this Proposition as to take into it, not only all that is directly, and expresly Commanded, or Forbidden by either of those Laws: But also all that by plain Collection of Right Reason in Applying Generals to Particulars, or comparing one thing with another doth appear to be Commanded or Forbidden by them.

So that by the *Law of Nature*, as it is a Rule of Conscience, we are not only to understand the prime Heads, and most general Dictates of it, (which are but a few) but also all the necessary Deductions from those Heads. And by the *Law of Scripture*, as it is the Rule of Conscience, we are not only to understand the expres Commands, and Prohibitions, we meet with there, in the letter of the Text; but all the things likewise, that by unavoidable Consequence do follow from those Commands, or Prohibitions. In a word, when we are deliberating with our selves, concerning the goodness, or badness, the Lawfulness, or Unlawfulness of this, or the other particular Action: We are not only to look upon the letter of the Law, but to attend further to what that Law may be supposed by a Rational Man to contain in it. And if we be convinced, that the Action we are deliberating about, is Commanded, or Forbidden, by direct *Inference*, or by *Parity of Reason*; we ought to look upon it as a Duty, or a Sin, though it be not expresly *Commanded*, or *Forbidden*, by the Law, in the letter of it. And if neither by the letter of the Law; nor by Consequence from it; nor by Parity of Reason; the Action before us, appear either to be Commanded, or Forbidden: In that Case, we are to look upon it, as an indifferent Action; which we may do, or let alone, with a safe Conscience; or, to express the thing more properly, we are to look upon it as an Action in which our *Conscience* is not so much concerned as our *Prudence*.

III. Having thus given an account of the *Rule* of *Conscience*, that which Naturally follows next to be considered, with Reference to our present design, is, *what share Humane Laws have in this Rule of Conscience?* whether they be a part of this Rule, and do really bind a Mans Conscience to the Observance of them or no? which is our Third general Head.

Now as to this, our Answer is, that though the *Laws of God* be the great, and indeed the only Rule of Conscience, yet the *Laws of Men*, generally speaking, do also bind the Conscience, and are a part of its Rule in a *Secondary* Sense, that is, by Vertue of, and in Subordination to the Laws of God.

I shall briefly explain the meaning of this, in the Four following Propositions.

First, there is nothing more certain than that the *Law of God, as it is declared both by Nature, and Scripture doth Command us, to Obey the Laws of Men.*

There is no one Dictate of Nature, more Obvious to us, than this, that we are to Obey the Government we Live under, in all honest, and Just things. For this is indeed the Principal Law, and Foundation of all Society. And it would be impossible, either for Kingdoms, or States, for Citys, or Families to subsist, or at least to maintain themselves in any Tolerable degree of Peace, and Happiness, if this be not acknowledged a Duty.

And then, as for the Laws of God in Scripture, there is nothing more plainly declared there, than, that it is Gods Will, and our Duty to *Obey them that have the Rule over us*; and to *Submit our selves to every Ordinance of Man, for the Lords sake, and to be Subject not only for Wrath but for Conscience sake.* So that no Man can doubt that he is really bound in Duty to Obey the Laws of Men that are made by Just, and Sufficient Authority. And Consequently no Man can doubt that

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Humane Laws do really bind the Conſcience, and are one part of the Rule by which it is to be directed, and Governed.

But then having ſaid this, we add this farther in the Second Place, that *Humane Laws do not bind the Conſcience, by any Vertue in themſelves; but meerly by Vertue of Gods Law, who has Commanded that we ſhould in all things be Subject to our Lawful Governours, not only for Wrath, but for Conſcience ſake.* Conſcience is not properly concerned with any Being in the World, ſave God alone, it hath no Superiour but him: For the very Notion of it, as I have often ſaid, is no other than *our Judgment, of what things we are bound to do by Gods Law; & what things we are Forbidden to do by Gods Law.*

So that all the Men in the World, cannot bind any Mans Conſcience, by Vertue of any Power, or Authority, that is in them: But now God having made it an everlaſting Law, both by *Nature*, and *Scripture*, that we ſhould Obey thoſe who are ſet over us, whether they be our *Parents*, or our *Maſters*; and much more our *Princes*, and the *Soveraign Legiſlative Power*, under whom we Live; by Vertue of this Command of God, and this only; we are for ever bound in Conſcience, to Govern our Actions, by the Commands, that they impoſe upon us; and thoſe Commands of theirs are a Rule, (though a *Conſequential*, or a *Secondary* Rule,) by which we are to Govern our Conſcience, becauſe they are the Inſtances of our Obedience to the Laws of God.

But then in the Third Place, this is alſo to be remembered; that *Humane Laws do no farther bind the Conſcience, and are a Rule of it, than as they are agreeable to the Laws of God.* If any Law, or Command of Man, do Claſh with any Law of God; that is, if it be either Evil in it ſelf, or Contradictory to the Duty

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of *Christians*, as laid down in the Scriptures; in that Case, that Law or Command, by what Humane Authority soever it was made or given, doth not bind our Conscience, nor is any Rule of our Actions. On the contrary we are not at any Rate to yield Obedience to it; but we are here reduced to the Apostles Case, and must Act as they did; that is, we *must Obey God, rather than Men*, and we Sin, if we do not. For since God only hath proper, and direct Authority over our Conscience, and Humane Power, only, by Delegation from him: And since God hath not given any Commission to the most Soveraign Princes upon Earth, to alter his Laws, or to impose any thing upon his Subjects, that is inconsistent with them. It follows by necessary Consequence, that no Man can be Obliged to Obey any Laws of Men, farther than they are agreeable to, and consistent with the Laws of God.

There is yet a Fourth thing, necessary to be taken in for the clearing the Point we are upon, and that is this, That though Humane Laws, generally speaking, may be said to bind the Conscience, and to be a part of its Rule: Yet we do not Assert that every *Humane Law*, (though it doth not interfere with any of Gods Laws) *doth at all times, and in all Cases, Oblige Every Mans Conscience to Active Obedience to it*; so as that he Sins against God, if he Transgress it. No, it would be a very hard thing to affirm this; and I do not know what Man among us, upon these Terms, would be Innocent.

Thus much I believe we may safely lay down as a Truth; That where either the *Matter* of the Law is of such a Nature; that the Publick, or some private Person shall Suffer Damage, or Inconvenience, by our not Observing it. Or Secondly, Though the Law, as to the *matter* of it be never so Trifling; nay, though perhaps

haps all things considered, it be an inconvenient Law; yet if the *Manner* of our not Obeying it, be such, as gives *Offence* to our Superiours, or to any others; that is, either Argues a *Contempt* of Authority, or sets an ill *Example* before our fellow Subjects: I say in either of these Cases, the Transgression of a Humane Law, renders a Man guilty of a *Fault*, as well as Obnoxious to the *Penalty* of that Law. But out of these two Cases, I must confess, I do not see, how a purely Humane Law doth Oblige the Conscience; or how the Transgression of it, doth make a Man guilty of Sin, before God. For it is certain if we secure these two Points; that is to say, the good of the Publick, and of private Persons; and with all the sacredness, and respect, which is due to Authority, (which is likewise in Order to the Publick good:) We Answer all the Ends, for which the Power of making Laws, or laying Commands upon Inferiours, was Committed by God to Mankind.

So that though it be true, that Humane Laws do Oblige the Conscience, yet it is also true that a great many Cases may, and do happen, in which a Man may Act contrary to a purely Humane Law, and yet not be a Sinner before God. Always supposing (as I said,) there be no *Contempt*, or *Refractoryness* expressed towards the Governours: Nor, no *Scandal*, or ill Example given to others, by *the Action*. For if there be either of these in the Case; I dare not acquit the Man, from being a Transgressour of Gods Law, in the instance, wherein he Transgresseth the Laws of *Men*.

For this is that which we insist upon; that the Authority of our Governours ought to be held, and esteemed very sacred, both because the Laws of *God*, and the Publick good require it should be so. And therefore, wherever they do peremptorily lay their

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Commands upon us, we are bound in Conſcience ſo far to comply, as not to *conteſt* the matter with them; nor to *ſeem* to do it. And though their Commands, as to the *matter* of them, be never ſo ſlight; nay, though they ſhould prove really inconvenient, either to our ſelves, or the Publick. Yet if they *ſtand* upon them, if they perſiſt in requiring our Obedience to them; we muſt yield, we muſt Obey; always ſuppoſing they be not againſt Gods Laws. For we are at no hand either to affront their Authority our ſelves; or to encourage others, by our Example, to do it. For to do either of theſe things is a greater Evil to the Publick, than our Obedience to an inconvenient *Law* can eaſily be.

IV. And now it is time for us to apply what hath been ſaid in General, concerning the *Rule of Conſcience*, and the *Obligation of Humane Laws*; to the particular Matter here before us; that is, the buſineſs of *Church Communion*; The *Obligation of Conſcience* to which, in ſuch manner as the *Laws* have appointed, is the Fourth general Head we are to conſider.

This point of the *Obligation to Communion with the Church, as by Law Eſtabliſhed*, hath been largely handled by ſeveral Learned Men of our Church, and particularly it is the Argument of one of thoſe Diſcourſes which have lately been writ for the ſake of our Diſſenters. Thither therefore I refer the Reader for full Satisfaction about this Matter being only juſt to touch upon it here, as one of the Principles we take for granted, and ſhall proceed upon in the following Diſcourſe.

And here the Propoſition we lay down is this, *That it is every Mans Duty, and conſequently every Man is bound in Conſcience to joyn in Communion with that Church, which is Eſtabliſhed by Law in the place where he lives;*

ſo

so long as that Church is a true, ſound part of the Catholick Church, and there is nothing impoſed or required as a Condition of Communicating with it, that is Repugnant to the Laws of God, or the Appointments of Jeſus Chriſt.

This Propoſition is Evident, not only becauſe it Neceſſarily follows from the foregoing Principle; which was, that every Man is bound in Conſcience to Obey the Laws of Men that are not contrary to the Laws of God; and therefore conſequently a Man is bound to Obey in *Eccleſiaſtical* matters, as well as *Civil*; (unleſs it can be ſhew'd that Chriſt hath forbid all Humane Authority, whether *Eccleſiaſtical* or *Civil*, to make any Laws or Orders about Religion; which I believe never was or can be ſhew'd:)

But it is Evident upon another Account, which I deſire may be conſidered. We are all really bound by the Laws of *Jeſus Chriſt*, and the Nature of his Religion to preſerve as much as in us lyes the *Unity* of the *Church*: Which *Unity* doth conſiſt not only in profeſſing the ſame *Faith*, but joyning together with our Brethren under Common *Governours* in the ſame Religious *Communion* of Worſhip, and Sacraments. And therefore whoever breaks this *Unity* of the Church, by withdrawing his Obedience from thoſe Church Governours, which God hath ſet over him in the place where he Lives; and Separating from the Eſtabliſhed Religious Aſſemblies of *Chriſtians* under thoſe Governours; doth really tranſgreſs the Laws of *Jeſus Chriſt*, and is Guilty of that Sin of *Schiſm*, which is ſo very much cautioned againſt, and ſo highly Condemned in the Scriptures of the New Teſtament: Unleſs in the mean time it doth appear to the Man, who thus withdraws, and Separates, that there is ſomething required of him in thoſe Aſſemblies, and by thoſe Governours, and that as a Term, and Condition of holding

Communion with them, which he cannot Submit to without Sin.

And this Point I do heartily wish was well considered by our dissenting Brethren. They do seem often to look upon this business of coming to Church, and joyning with us in Prayers and Sacraments, no otherwise to bind their Conscience than other purely Humane Laws. They think they owe no Obedience to the Laws in these matters, different from that which they yield to any common Act of Parliament. And therefore no wonder they often make so slight a business of them.

But this is a great mistake, there is much more in these things than this comes to. The withdrawing our Communion from the Church carrys a far greater guilt in it, than the Violating any Law, that is purely Humane. For though we do readily grant that all the Circumstances of Publick Worship enjoyned in the Church, as for Instance, the Times, the Gestures, the Forms of Prayer, the Methods of Reading the Scripture, and Administring the Sacraments; as also the Habits of the Ministers that are to Officiate; be all of *Humane* Institution, and may be altered, and varyed at the discretion of our Governours; Yet the Publick Worship it self under Publick Lawful Governours is of Divine Appointment, and no Man can Renounce it without Sinning against *Jesus Christ*, as well as Offending against the *Ecclesiastical* Laws.

A *Humane* Law grounded upon a *Divine*, or to speak more properly, a *Divine* Law modify'd or Clothed with several Circumstances of Mans Appointment, doth Create another kind of Obligation upon every Subject, than a Law that is purely *Humane*; that is to say a Law, the matter of which is neither Good nor Evil in it self, but perfectly indifferent. In the former

Case

Case, we must yield Obedience to the Law, as to the Law of God; however it comes Clothed with Circumstances of Mans Appointment. In the other Case we only yield Obedience, as to the Command of Man; and for no other reason, than that God in general hath Obliged us to Obey our Superiors.

To make this a little plainer, let us for Instance take the business of Paying *Tribute*, and *Custom* in this Nation, in which Case there is a Complication of a Divine Law, with a Humane, as it is in the Case we are now upon. That every Subject should *Pay Tribute to whom Tribute is due; Custom to whom Custom is due*; is a Law of God; as being a branch both of Natural and Christian Justice. But out of what goods we should Pay Tribute or Custom, or what Proportion of those Goods should be Paid, this is not defined either by the Law of Nature or the Law of the Gospel, but is left to the Determination of the Municipal Laws of every Kingdom. But now, because Humane Authority doth interpose in this Affair, and settles what every Man is to Pay to the King, and out of what Commodities; doth it therefore follow, that if a Man can by Fraud or Concealment detain the Kings Right from him, that he incurs no other guilt for this, but only the Transgressing of an Act of Parliament, and the being Obnoxious to the Penalties, in Case he be detected? No certainly; for all that the Customs in that manner, and form be settled upon the King by Humane Law only; yet the matter of that Law being a point of Natural Justice between Man and Man; the Man that is thus Guilty, ought to look upon himself as an Offender against the Divine Law; as an unjust Person before God. And his willingness to Submit to the Forfeiture of his Goods, will not render him less unjust, or more excuseable.

The Case is much the same as to the matter we have now before us. It is not a meer Humane Law,

or Act of Parliament that Obligeth us to keep the Unity of the Church; to bring our Children to be made Christians by Baptisme; to meet together at Solemn times for the Profession of our Faith, for the Worshipping God, for the Commemorating the Death of our Saviour in the Sacrament of his Supper. All this is tyed upon us by the Laws of *Christ*. These things are as much required of us by God, as *Christians*; as it is required that we should Pay the King, and every Man, what is due to them, if we would not be dishoneſt & unjuſt. It is true that the particular Forms, and Modes, and Circumstances of doing these things, are not Commanded, nor Prescribed, by the Laws of *Christ*, in this Instance of Church Communion, no more than they are prescribed by the Laws of God in the other Instance I gave: But they are left intirely to the Prudence, and Discretion of the Governours that God hath set over us in Ecclesiastical matters; just as they are in the other. But in the mean time these things thus Clothed by Humane Authority, as to their *Circumstances*: Yet being for the *Matter* of them bound upon us by *Christ* himself, we can no more deny our Obedience to the Publick Laws about them, than we can in the other Instance I have named. And that Man may as well for Instance, purge himself from the Imputation of *Knavery* before God, that will contrive a way of his own, for the Paying his just Debts contrary to what the Law of the Land hath declared to be Just and Honeſt: As any Man can acquit himself from the Sin of Schism before God, that will chuse a way of his own for the Publick Worship, different from, and in Opposition to what the Laws of the Church have prescribed; always supposing, that the Worship Established be Commanded by just Authority, and there be nothing required in it as a Condition

dition of Communion that is againſt the Laws of *Jeſus Chriſt*.

The Sum of all this is, that it is every Mans Duty by the Laws of Chriſt, as well as the Laws of Man, to Worſhip God in the way of the Church; ſo long as there is nothing required in that Worſhip, that can juſtly offend the Conſcience of a Wiſe and Good Chriſtian. And therefore there is more in departing from the Communion of the Church, when we can Lawfully hold it, than meerly the Violation of a *Statute*, or a *Humane Law*, for we cannot do it without breaking the Law of God. Nay ſo much is it againſt the Law of God to do this, that I think no Authority upon Earth can warrant it. So that even if there was a Law made, which ſhould Ordain that wilful, cauſleſs Separation from the Eſtabliſhed Church ſhould be allowed and tolerated, and no Man ſhould be called to an Account for it: Yet nevertheleſs ſuch a Separation would ſtill be a *Schiſm*, would ſtill be a Sin againſt God; for no Humane Law can make that Lawful which Gods Law hath forbid.

There now only remains our laſt general Head about Conſcience to be ſpoken to, and then we have done with our *Preliminary* Points: And that is concerning the *Authority of Conſcience*, or *how far a Man is Obliged to follow or be guided by his Conſcience in his Actions*.

When we ſpeak of the Obligation of Conſcience, or of being bound in Conſcience to do or not to do an Action, it ſufficiently appears from what hath been ſaid, that we can mean no more by theſe Phraſes than this, that we are convinced in our Judgment that it is our Duty to do this or the other Action, becauſe we believe that God hath Commanded it. Or we are perſwaded in our Judgment that we ought to forbear this,

this or the other Action, because we believe that God hath forbidden it.

This now being that which we mean by the *Obligation* of *Conſcience*, here we come to inquire how far this Perſwaſion or Judgment of ours, concerning what is our Duty, and what is Sinful, hath Authority over us; how far it doth Oblige us to Act or not Act, according to it.

Now in Order to the reſolving of this we muſt take Notice, that our Judgment concerning what God hath Commanded, or Forbidden, or left Indifferent, is either true or falſe. We either make a right Judgment of our Duty, or we make a wrong one. In the former Caſe we call our Judgment a *Right Conſcience*; in the latter we call it an *Erroneous Conſcience*. As for thoſe Caſes where we doubt and heſitate, and know not well how to make any Judgment at all (which is that we call a *Doubting Conſcience*, but indeed is properly no Conſcience, unleſs by Accident,) we have nothing here to do with them, but ſhall reſerve them to another place. Here we ſuppoſe, that we do make a Judgment of the thing; that is, we are perſwaded in our Minds, concerning the goodneſs, or badneſs of this, or the other Action: And that which we are to inquire into, is, how far that Judgment binds us to Act according to it.

Now if our Conſcience be a *Right Conſcience*; that is, if we have truly informed our Judgment according to the Rule of Gods Law: It is beyond all Queſtion, and acknowledged by all the World, that we are in that Caſe perpetually bound to Act according to our Judgment. It is for ever our Duty ſo to do; and there can no blame, no guilt fall upon us, for ſo doing, let the Conſequence of our Acting, or not Acting, be what it will. So that as to a *Right Conſcience*, or a well

well informed Judgment, there is no diſpute among any ſort of Men.

But the great thing to be inquired into, is, what Obligation a Man is under to Act according to his Judgment, ſuppoſing it be falſe, ſuppoſing he hath not rightly informed his Conſcience, but hath taken up falſe meaſures of what God hath Commanded, or Forbidden.

Now for the Reſolution of this, I lay down theſe Three Propoſitions, which I think will take in all that is needful, for the giving Satisfaction to every one, concerning this point.

First, *Where a Man is miſtaken in his Judgment, even in that Caſe it is always a Sin to Act againſt it.* Be our Conſcience never ſo ill inſtructed, as to what is *Good*, or *Evil*, though we ſhould take that for a *Duty*, which is really a *Sin*; and on the contrary, that for a *Sin* which is really a *Duty*: Yet ſo long as we are thus perſuaded, it will be highly Criminal in us, to Act in contradiction to this perſuaſion; and the reaſon of this is evident, becauſe, by ſo doing, we wilfully Act againſt the beſt light, which at preſent we have, for the direction of our Actions; and conſequently our *Will* is as faulty, and as wicked, in conſenting to ſuch Actions, as if we had had truer Notions of things.

We are to remember, that the *Rule* of our Duty, whatever it be in it ſelf, cannot touch or affect our Actions, but by the Mediation of our *Conſcience*; that is, no farther than as it is apprehended by us, or as we do underſtand and remember it. So that when all is done, the *immediate Guide* of our Actions, can be nothing but our *Conſcience*; our Judgment and Perſwaſion, concerning the Goodneſs, or Badneſs, or Indifferency, of things.

It is true in all thoſe Inſtances where we are miſta-

ken,

ken, our Conſcience proves but a very bad and unſafe *Guide*; becauſe it hath it ſelf loſt its way, in not following its *Rule* as it ſhould have done: But however our *Guide* ſtill it is, and we have no other guide of our Actions but that. And if we may lawfully refuſe to be guided by it in one Inſtance, we may with as much reaſon reject its Guidance in all.

What is the Notion that any of us hath of a Wilful Sin, or a Sin againſt Knowledg, but this? That we have done otherwiſe than we were convinced to be our Duty, at the ſame time that we did ſo. And what other meaſures have we of any Mans *Sincerity* or *Hypocriſie*? But only this; that he Acts according to the beſt of his Judgment, or that he doth not Act according to what he pretends to Believe.

We do not indeed ſay, that every one is a *good* Man, that Acts according to his Judgment; or that he is to be commended for all Actions that are done in purſuance of his Perſwaſion: No, we meaſure *Vertue* and *Vice* by the *Rule*, according to which, a Man ought to Act; as *well* as by the Mans *intention* in Acting. But however we all agree that that Man is a *Knave*, that in any inſtance Acts contrary to that which he took to be his *duty*. And in paſſing this Sentence we have no regard to this, whether the Man was Right or miſtaken in his Judgment, for be his Judgment Right or Wrong, True or Falſe; it is all one as to his Honeſty, in Acting or not Acting according to it.

He that hath a falſe perſwaſion of things; ſo long as that perſwaſion continues, is often as well ſatisfied that he is in the Right, as if his Perſwaſion was true. That is, he is oftentimes as Confident when he is in an Error, as when he is in the Right. And therefore we cannot but conclude, that he, who being under a miſtake, will be tempted to Act contrary to his Judgment;

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would certainly upon the ſame Temptation Act contrary to it, was his Judgment never ſo well informed And therefore his *Will* being as bad in the one Caſe, as in the other, he is equally a Sinner as to the *Wilfulneſs* of the Crime, tho indeed in other reſpects there will be a great difference in the Caſes.

This I believe is the Senſe of all Men in this matter. If a Man for inſtance, ſhould of a *Jew* become a *Chriſtian*; while yet in his Heart he believeth that the *Meſſiah* is not yet come, and that our Lord *Jeſus* was an Impoſtor. Or if a *Papiſt* ſhould to ſerve ſome private ends, Renounce the Communion of the *Roman* Church, and joyn with ours; while yet he is perſwaded that the *Roman* Church is the *only Catholick* Church; and that our Reformed Churches are *Heretical* or *Schiſmatical*: Though now there is none of us will deny that the Men in both theſe Caſes have made a good change; as having changed a *falſe* Religion for a *true* one: yet for all that, I dare ſay, we ſhould all agree, they were both of them great *Villains* and *Hypocrites*, for making that change; becauſe they made it not upon Honeſt Principles, and in purſuance of their Judgment, but in direct Contradiction to both. Nay I dare ſay we ſhould all of us think better of an ignorant well meaning *Proteſtant*; that being ſeduced by the perſwaſions and Artifices of a cunning *Popiſh Factor*, did really out of Conſcience, abandon our Communion, and go over to the *Romaniſts*; as thinking theirs to be the ſafeſt: I ſay we ſhould all of us entertain a more favourable Opinion of ſuch a Man in ſuch a Caſe; Though really here the change is made from a true Religion to a falſe one; than we ſhould of either of the other Men I have before named. All this put together is abundantly ſufficient to ſhew that no Man

can in any Case Act against his Judgment or Perswasion, but he is Guilty of Sin in so doing,

But then, our Second Proposition is this, *The mistake of a Mans Judgment may be of such a Nature, that as it will be a Sin to Act against his Judgment, so it will likewise be a Sin to Act according to it.*

For what Authority soever a Mans Conscience has over him, it can never bear him out, if he do an Evil thing in compliance with it. My Judgment is (as we have said) the guide of my Actions; but it may through my negligence be so far misguided it self; as that if I follow it, it will lead me into the most horrid Crimes in the World. And will it be a sufficient Excuse or Justification of my Action in such a Case to say; that indeed herein I did but Act according to my Perswasion? No verily; I may as certainly be damn'd without Repentance, for Acting according to my Judgment, in some Cases, where it is mistaken, as I shall be, for Acting contrary to it in other Cases where it is rightly informed.

And the Reason of this is very plain. It is not my Judgment or Perswasion that makes *Good* or *Evil*, *Right* or *Wrong*, *Justice* or *Injustice*, *Vertue* or *Vice*. But it is the Nature of things themselves; and the Law of God, (and of Men under that) Commanding or Forbidding things, that makes them so. If the *Moral* Goodness, or badness of Actions was to be measured by Mens Opinions, and Perswasions; then Good and Evil, Duty and Sin, would be the most various, uncertain things in the World. They would change their Natures as often as Men change their Opinions; and that which to Day is a Vertue, to Morrow would be a Crime; and that which in one Man, would be a Heroically good Action, would in another Man be a Prodigious Piece of Villany; though yet there was no differ-

difference in the Action it self, or in the Circumstances of the Man that did it, save only the difference of Opinion.

But such consequences as these are intolerable, nor indeed do Men either talk or think after this manner. Every Man when he speaks of Good or Evil, Lawful or Unlawful, means some certain fixed thing which it is not in his Power to alter the Nature and Property of. That Action is good, and a Duty, which is either so in it self, or made so by some positive Law of God. And that Action is Evil, and a Sin, that is Forbid by God in either of these Ways. So that unless it was in our Power to change the Nature of things; or to alter the Laws of God: It will unavoidably follow; that we shall be for ever Obliged to do some Actions, and to forbear others, whatever our Judgment concerning them, is: And consequently we may be Guilty of Sin, if in these instances we Act contrary to this Obligation; though at the same time it should happen that we are firmly perswaded that we ought so to do.

And thus is our Proposition fully proved; but then for the further clearing of it, I desire it may be taken notice of: that we do not thus lay it down, that every mistake of Judgment about Good or Evil, doth involve a Man in Sin, if he Act according to that mistake: But only thus, the mistake of a Mans Judgment *may be* of such a Nature, that as it will be a Sin in him to Act against it, so it will likewise be Sin to Act according to it. It is not every Error in Morals that brings a Man under the necessity of Sinning, if he pursues it in his Actions. A Mans Conscience may mistake its Rule in a Hundred instances, and yet he may safely enough Act according to it. And the Reason is because a Man may entertain a great many mis-

mistakes, and false Notions of his Duty, and Act according to them too; and yet in such Actions he shall not Transgress any Law of God.

Now this that I say, holds chiefly in these two instances. For example in the first place, if a Man believe a thing to be Commanded by God which yet indeed is not; but neither is it Forbidden: As if a Man should think himself Obliged to retire himself from his business, *Seven* times or *Three* times a Day, for the purpose of Devotion; or to give half of his Yearly Income to Pious, and Charitable uses, if he can do it without Prejudice to his family. Now in this Case he is certainly mistaken in his Duty; for the Law of God hath not bound him up to such measures in either of these instances: But yet because God hath not on the other hand laid any Commands upon him to the contrary; it is certain he may in both these instances Act according to this mistake, without any Guilt in the World; Nay, so long as that mistake continues, he is bound to Act accordingly.

Again in the second place, if a Man believe a thing to be Forbidden by Gods Law, which yet is not; but neither is it Commanded: As for instance, if a Man think that he ought by Vertue of a Divine Command to abstain from all Meats that are strangled or have Bloud in them; or if he believe it unlawful to Play at Cards or Dice; or that it is Forbidden by Gods word to let out Money at Intereſt: Why in all these Cases he may follow his Opinion, though it be a false one, without Sin; Nay, he is bound to follow it, because it is the dictate of his Conscience, however his Conscience be mistaken. And the reason is plain, because though he be mistaken in his Judgment about these matters, yet since God hath not by any Law, Forbid these

theſe things; there is no Tranſgreſſion follows upon Acting according to ſuch a miſtake.

But then in other Caſes where a Mans miſtake happens to be of ſuch a Nature, as that he cannot Act according to his Conſcience, but he Tranſgreſſeth ſome Law of God; by which Conſcience ought to be Governed: As for inſtance, when a Man looks upon that as a Lawful Action, or as a Duty, which God hath Forbidden; or looks upon that as a Sin, or at leaſt an indifferent Action, which God hath Commanded; here it is that the miſtake becomes dangerous. And in ſuch Caſes the Man is brought into that ſad *Dilemma* we have been repreſenting, *viz.* That if he Act according to his perſwaſion he Tranſgreſſeth Gods Law, and ſo is a Sinner upon that Account: If he Acts againſt his perſwaſion, then he is ſelf condemned, and very guilty before God upon that Account.

Well, but is there no avoiding of this? Muſt it be laid down as a conſtant Univerſal Truth; that in all Caſes where a Mans Judgment happens to be contrary to the Rule of his Duty, Commanding, or Forbidding an Action; he muſt of neceſſity Sin; whether he Act, or not Act, according to that Judgment? If indeed he Act againſt his Conſcience, it is readily granted he Sins; But it ſeems very hard, that he ſhould be under a neceſſity of Sinning when he Acts according to it; eſpecially when he is perfectly ignorant of, or miſtaken in the Law againſt which he Offends.

This is indeed the great difficulty that occurs in this matter; and for the untying it, I lay down this third general Propoſition, *viz.* *That the great thing to be attended to in this Caſe of a Mans following a miſtaken Judgment, is the Culpableneſs or Inculpableneſs; the Faultineſs or Innocence of the miſtake, upon which he Acts;*

for

for according as this is; ſo will his Guilt in Acting according to it be either greater, or leſs, or none at all.

We do not ſay that a Man is always Guilty of a Sin before God, when upon a miſinformation of Judgment he Omits that which Gods Law hath Commanded; or doth that which Gods Law hath Forbidden. No though theſe Omiſſions or Actions may be ſaid to be Sins in themſelves; that is, as to the *Matter* of them; as being Tranſgreſſions of Gods Law; Yet before we affirm that they will be imputed to a Man as ſuch; that is prove *formally* Sins to him; we firſt conſider the Nature of the Action, and the Circumſtances of the Man. If we find upon Examination that the inſtance wherein Gods Law is Tranſgreſſed, is ſuch an inſtance as even an Honeſt minded Man may well be ſuppoſed to miſtake in: And if we find likewiſe that the Man had not ſufficient means for the informing himſelf aright as to this matter; and that he hath done all that he could do in his Circumſtances to underſtand his Duty: If in ſuch a Caſe as this he be miſtaken in his Duty; and Act upon that miſtake; yet we do not ſay that the Man is properly Guilty of any Sin in that Action, however that Action is indeed contrary to the Law of God. On the contrary we believe him to be Innocent as to this matter; nor will God ever call him to an Account for what he hath done or omitted in theſe Circumſtances.

And the Reaſons and Grounds upon which we affirm this are plain, and Evident at the firſt hearing. No Man can be Obliged to do more then what is in his Power to do. And what ever a Man is not Obliged to do, it is no Sin in him if he do it not. So that if a Man do all that one in his Circumſtances can, or ſhould do; for the right underſtanding of his Duty: If he happens to be miſtaken, that miſtake cannot be imputed

to

to him as a Sin; because he was not Obliged to understand better. And if his mistake be no Sin, it is certain to Act according to that mistake can be no Sin neither.

So that the whole point of Sinning, or not Sinning, in following an *Erroneous Conscience*, lies here. Whether the Man that is thus misperſuaded, is to be blamed, or not blamed, for his Miſperſuaſion. If the Error he hath taken up do not proceed from his own Fault and Negligence; but was the pure unavoidable Effects of the Circumſtances, in which he is placed; (which Circumſtances we ſuppoſe he contributed nothing to, but he was put into them by the diſpoſition of Divine Providence;) Then of what Nature ſoever the Error be; he doth not contract any guilt by any Action which he doth in purſuance of that Error. But if it was in his power to Rectifie that Error; if he had Means and Opportunities to inform his Conſcience better; and the nature of the Action was ſuch, that it was his Duty ſo to do: So that he muſt be accounted guilty of a Groſs and Criminal Neglect in not doing it: In this Caſe the Man is a Tranſgreſſor, and accountable unto God, as ſuch, for all the Actions that he doth, or omits, contrary to Gods Law, while he Acts under that miſtake, or in purſuance of it. And accordingly as this Neglect or Careleſneſs is greater or leſs; ſo is the Sinfulneſs of the Action which he doth in purſuance of it, greater or leſs likewiſe.

And this is a plain account of this matter. So that we ſee there is no Fatal unavoidable neceſſity laid upon any Man to commit a Sin by Acting according to his Conſcience. But if at any time he be brought under thoſe ſad Circumſtances, he brings that neceſſity upon himſelf. God never put any Man into ſuch a Condition, but that he might do that Duty which was required

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red of him; and be able to give a good account of his Actions. But here is the thing; Men by their Vice and Wickedness; by neglecting the Means of Instruction, that are afforded them; and not using their Reason and Understanding as they should do; may suffer themselves to be brought under the Bondage of such False and Evil Principles; that they shall so long as they hold those Principles, fall into Sin, whether they Act according to their Conscience, or Act against it.

I have done with the general Points concerning *Conscience*, which I thought needful to be premised, as the Grounds and Principles of our following Discourse. I now come to that which I at first proposed; and for the sake of which all this is intended; that is, to speak to the Case of those that *Separate from the Communion of the Church of* England, *upon this pretence; That it is against their Conscience to join with us in it.*

Now all that I conceive needful to be done, in order to a full discussion of this Case, and giving satisfaction about it, are these Two things,

First, To *Separate the pretences of Conscience that are truly and justly made, in this matter, from the false ones.* Or to shew who those are that can rightly plead Conscience for their Nonconformity; and who those are that cannot.

Secondly, To inquire how far this *Plea of Conscience*, when it is *truly made, will Justifie any Dissenter that continues in Separation from the Church as Established among us*, and what is to be done by such a Person, in order to his Acting with a safe and good Conscience in this affair.

Our first inquiry is what is required in order to any Mans truly pleading Conscience for his refusing to joyn in Communion with the Established Church. Or

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who thoſe Perſons are that can with juſtice make that Plea for themſelves.

I think it very convenient to begin my Diſquiſition here, becauſe by removing all the falſe Pretences to Conſcience; the Controverſy will be brought into a much leſs compaſs; and the difficulties that ariſe will be more eaſily untyed. The truth is, if the thing be examined, I believe it will be found, that the pretence to Conſcience in the matter we are talking of, is, as in many other Caſes, extended much farther than it ought to be. My meaning is, that of all thoſe who think fit to withdraw from our Communion, and to live in Diſobedience to the known Laws of the Church, and pretend Conſcience for ſo doing; in a great many of them it is not Conſcience, but ſome other thing miſtaken for Conſcience, which is the Principle they Act upon. So that if the true Plea of Conſcience be ſeparated from thoſe counterfeit ones, which uſually uſurp that Name; we ſhall not find either the Perſons to be ſo many that refuſe Communion with us, upon the Account of Conſcience truly ſo called; nor the Caſes to be ſo many in which they do refuſe it upon that Account.

Now in Order to the making ſuch a Separation or Diſtinction between Conſcience *truly* ſo called, and the ſeveral *Pretences* to it, in this buſineſs of not conforming to the Eſtabliſhed Worſhip, I lay down this general Propoſition; That, if the Principles I have laid down about Conſcience be admitted; then it is certainly true, that no Man among us can juſtly plead Conſcience for his Separation from the Church of *England*; or can ſay that it is againſt his Conſcience to joyn in Communion with it; but only ſuch a one, as is perſwaded in his own mind, that he cannot Communicate with us without Sinning againſt God in ſo doing.

For ſince, as we have ſaid, Conſcience is nothing elſe but a Mans Judgment concerning Actions, whether they be Duties, or Sins, or Indifferent: And ſince the Law of God Commanding or Forbidding Actions; or neither Commanding them, nor Forbidding them; is the only Rule by which a Man can Judg what Actions are Duties, and what are Sins, and what are Indifferent: It plainly follows; that as a Man cannot be *bound in Conſcience* to do any Action which it doth not appear to him that Gods Law hath ſome way or other Commanded, and made a Duty: So neither can it *go againſt a Mans Conſcience*, to do any Action which he is not convinced that Gods Law hath ſome way or other Forbidden, and ſo made a Sin. And therefore in our preſent Caſe. That Man only can juſtly plead Conſcience for his Nonconformity that can truly ſay he is perſwaded in his Judgment that Conformity is Forbidden by ſome Law of God: Or which is the ſame thing; No Man can ſay, it is againſt his Conſcience to joyn in our Communion, but only ſuch a one as really believes he ſhall Sin againſt ſome Law of God, if he do joyn with us.

If againſt this it be excepted; that it is very poſſible for a Man to be well ſatisfied that there is nothing directly Sinful in our Worſhip; but yet for all that it may be againſt his Conſcience to joyn with us in it: As for inſtance, in the Caſe where a Man takes it really to be his Duty to hold conſtant Communion with ſome other Congregation, where he believes he can be more Edified, or to which he is related by ſome Church Covenant: To this I anſwer, that in this Caſe, I grant, Conſcience is rightly pleaded for Separation (though how juſtifiably I do not now Examine:) But then I ſay this Plea proceeds upon the ſame grounds I juſt now laid down. For if the Man (as is ſuppoſed

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in the Caſe) be convinced that it is his Duty by Gods Law, (as there is no other meaſure of Duty) to hold Communion with others, and not with us ; then he muſt at the ſame time be convinced that he cannot without Tranſgreſſion of Gods Law, (that is, without Sin,) joyn with us ; And that is the ſame Account which we give, of its being againſt any Mans Couſcience to hold Communion with us.

Further, If it be urged againſt our Propoſition, that not only in the Caſe where a Man is perſwaded of the Unlawfulneſs of our Communion, but alſo in the Caſe where he only doubts of the Lawfulneſs of it, a Man may juſtly plead Conſcience for his Nonconformity, ſo long as thoſe doubts remain : And therefore it is not truly ſaid of us, that in Order to the Pleading Conſcience for Nonconformity, one muſt be perſwaded in his own mind, that Conformity is Forbidden by ſome Law of God. I Anſwer, that if the Man who thus doubts of the Lawfulneſs of Conformity, hath really entertain'd this Principle, that it is a Sin to do any thing with a doubting Conſcience ; I grant that it muſt go againſt his Conſcience to conform ſo long as he doubts. But then, this is but the ſame thing we are contending for ; for therefore it goes againſt his Conſcience to Communicate with us, doubting as he doth ; becauſe he believes he ſhall Sin againſt God if he ſhould. But if the Man we are ſpeaking of, do not think it a breach of Gods Law, to Act with a doubting Conſcience ; then I do not ſee how it can in the leaſt go againſt his Conſcience to Communicate with us upon that pretence. So that notwithſtanding theſe two Exceptions ; which are all I can think of ; it will ſtill remain true, that no Man can juſtly Plead Conſcience for his Separation from the Church, but he that is perſwaded that he

he cannot joyn with it without Sinning against God.

Now if this Propoſition be true, as certainly it is; then how many Mens pretences to Conſcience for their Separating from us, are hereby cut off: And indeed how few (in Compariſon of the multitude of Diſſenters among us) will be left, that can be able with Truth to ſay that it is againſt their Conſcience to Communicate with us in our Prayers, and in our Sacraments.

In the firſt Place, it is Evident that all thoſe who Separate from us upon Account of any *private grudge* or *pique*; becauſe they have been diſobliged, or have received ſome diſappointment in the way of our Church, or by the Men that are favourers of it; and therefore out of a Pet will joyn themſelves to another Communion. All thoſe that think they can ſerve their own turns more effectually, by being of another way; as for inſtance, they can thereby better *pleaſe a Relation* from whom they have expectances; they can better advance their Trade, or increaſe their Fortunes; they can better *procure a Reputation*, or *regain* one that is *Sunk*. In a word, all thoſe that to ſerve any ends of *Pride*, or *Intereſt*, or *Paſſion*, or out of any other worldly Conſideration, do refuſe us their Company in the Worſhip of God: I ſay, all ſuch are certainly excluded from Pleading Conſcience for their Separation.

In the ſecond Place, all thoſe Lay People who refuſe our Communion upon Account that the *Paſtors*, and *Teachers*, whom they moſt Love, and Reverence, are not permitted to Exerciſe their Function among us; whoſe Pretence it is, that if theſe good Men were allowed to Teach in our Churches, they would come to our Congregations; but ſo long as that is refuſed, they will hear them where they can: I ſay, all theſe are likewiſe excluded from Pleading Conſcience for their Separation.

paration. For, however it may really and truly be against the Conſcience of their *Miniſters* to conform, (there being other things required of them, than of ordinary People,) yet it is not againſt *their* Conſcience ſo to do; for they know no ill in Conformity, but only that ſo many good Men are ſilenced.

In the third Place, all thoſe that refuſe our Communion upon a *meer diſlike* of ſeveral things in our Church Offices: They do not for inſtance, like a *Form* of *Prayer* in general, and they have ſeveral things to Object againſt our *Form* in particular; they do not like our *Ceremonies*, they do not like the *Surplice*, or the *Croſs in* Baptiſm; and ſundry other things they find fault with: Not that they have any thing to ſay againſt the Lawfulneſs of theſe things; but only they have an Averſion to them: All theſe Men likewiſe are cut off from Pleading Conſcience for their Separation. For they do not pretend that it is unlawful, or a Sin againſt God to joyn with us in our Service (which is the only thing wherein their Conſcience can be concerned;) but only they are not *pleaſed* with many things in our Service; as fancying them not to be ſo decent, or convenient, or not to be ſo prudently Order'd as they would have them. But what of all this? Admit the things to be ſo as they fancy them; yet ſtill ſo long as they do not think there is any Sin in them, it cannot go againſt their Conſcience to joyn with any Aſſembly in which they are Practiſed. Becauſe Conſcience as we have often ſaid is not touched, is not affected where no Law of God is Tranſgreſſed.

In the fourth Place, all thoſe that are kept from our Communion, purely upon the Account of *Education*, or acquaintance with Perſons that are of another perſwaſion. Thoſe that have nothing to ſay againſt our Worſhip; but only that they were bred in another way;

or those that would joyn with us in it, but that they know a great many Religious Godly Persons that do Condemn it, and therefore they dare not come at us. These now may be very well meaning Men, but yet they cannot reasonably Plead Conscience upon this Account for their Separation. For it is not a Mans Education, or the Example, or Opinion of other Men, that makes any Action to be a Duty, or a Sin, but the Law of God Commanding or Forbidding that Action. And therefore before I can say that this, or the other Action, is against my Conscience, I must believe that Gods Law hath either in general, or in particular; either directly, or by Consequence, made that Action unlawful. I grant the Opinions of other Men, especially those that are Learned, and Pious are always to be listned to in doubtful Cases. But then, no Mans Opinion can be the Rule of my Conscience; nor am I at all concerned in Conscience to follow it, any farther than I am convinced that it declares Gods Law to me. And therefore sure in this Case of Church Communion, I can be but very little concerned to follow any Mans Opinion; when, both there are so many Persons, and those as Learned and as Pious as any others, that are of another Opinion; and when also the Publick Law, which has much more Authority than any private Opinion, hath determined what I am to do in the Case. So that it is great weakness, & sillyness; & not Conscience, that prevails with these Men I am speaking of, to live in disobedience to the Laws. If indeed they be really perswaded in their own Minds, that our way of Worshipping God, is in any part or instance of it Unlawful or Forbidden, (let that Perswasion be upon what grounds it will,) then they may truly say it is against their Conscience to joyn with us. But if they be not convinced of this; I do not see how

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the Example, or the advice of their Friends and Acquaintance, can in the least give them a Title to Plead Conſcience for their refuſing our Communion.

Fifthly, thoſe that withdraw from the Church upon this Account, that our Governours in their Laws and Preſcriptions about Gods Worſhip, have not rightly uſed the Power which they are intruſted with, but have exceeded their bounds; have made perhaps too great Encroachments upon *Chriſtian Liberty*; or laid more ſtreſs than was meet upon *Indifferent things*: Theſe likewiſe are excluded by the former Rule from Pleading Conſcience for their Separation. For admit the Law-givers have been to blame in the Exerciſe of their Power in theſe matters, (which yet is ſooner ſaid then proved,) and have really done more then they can anſwer to God for; yet what is this to them? The Conſcience of the Governours is indeed deeply concerned about theſe things; and they muſt give an Account to God for the abuſe of their Authority if there be any. But how this doth concern the Conſcience of the Subject, is not eaſily underſtood: So long as what is Commanded or Enjoyned, doth not appear to interfere with any Law of God. But having ſaid this, I fear there is too much reaſon to add; that thoſe who ſo much ſtand up for *Chriſtian Liberty*, and would be thought the great Patrons of it; do by their endleſs ſcruples about Indifferent things, and refuſing to Obey Authority in ſuch matters, in all appearance, take the moſt Effectuall Courſe to deſtroy all *Chriſtian Liberty*, in the true Notion of it; and to bring in a Religion that ſhall conſiſt of *Touch not*, *Taſt not*, *Handle not*; and ſuch other Uncommanded things.

Sixthly, and laſtly, (to name no more inſtances) All thoſe that can Communicate *Occaſionally* with us, in our Prayers and Sacraments. As for inſtance, thoſe that

that when they have a turn to be ſerved, when there is an Office or ſome ſuch thing in the Caſe; can come to Church, and receive the Communion, but at other times they do not afford us their Preſence: Theſe are alſo excluded from pretending to Conſcience, for their not *conſtantly* joyning in Communion with us. For if indeed they did believe, it was a Sin in them to joyn with us in our Prayers and Sacraments; with what Conſcience dare they do it at all? They ought not for any worldly good, to venture upon ſuch an Action as they do believe to be forbidden by Gods Laws; But if they do not believe that to joyn in our Communion is a Sinful thing, (as I dare ſay none of theſe Perſons do) then I will be bold to make the Inference; that it cannot be more againſt their Conſcience to do it *Thrice*, than to do it *Once*; and do it *conſtantly* than to do it *Thrice*.

But let us leave the falſe Pretenders to Conſcience; and come to the Caſe of thoſe who can juſtly Plead Conſcience for their Separation; or that can truly ſay it is againſt their Conſcience to joyn in our Communion.

Of this ſort are all ſuch, and none but ſuch, as do really believe that our Communion is unlawful, or that they cannot Communicate with us without Sin, as I have before proved.

As for thoſe that only doubt of the Lawfulneſs of our Communion, but are not perſwaded that it is unlawful; I do not here conſider them; becauſe they cannot ſay that it is *againſt their Conſcience* to Communicate with us; any more than they can ſay, that they are *bound in Conſcience* to Communicate with us: For they are uncertain as to both theſe things, and are not determined either way. But however becauſe theſe men may juſtly Plead Conſcience upon this Account; that they think it is a Sin to joyn with us

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ſo long as they doubt of the Lawfulneſs of our Communion: I ſhall conſider their Caſe afterwards in a particular Diſcourſe upon that Argument.

Thoſe that I am now concerned with, are ſuch, as do believe, or are perſwaded, that there is ſome thing in our Worſhip which they cannot comply with without Sinning againſt God.

And my buſineſs is to Examine *whether ſuch a Belief or Perſwaſion of the Unlawfulneſs of our Communion will juſtifie any Mans Separation from us? Or how far it will do it? And what is to be done by ſuch Perſons, in order, either to their Communicating, or not Communicating with us, with a ſafe Conſcience?* This is our ſecond Point, and I apply my ſelf to it.

There are a great many among us, that would with all their Hearts (as they ſay) Obey the Laws of the Church, and joyn in our Worſhip and Sacraments; but they are really perſwaded that they cannot do it without Sin: For there are ſome things required of them as Conditions of Communicating with us, which are Forbidden by the Laws of God.

As for Inſtance, it is againſt the Commands of *Chriſt* to appoint, or to uſe any thing in the Worſhip of God, which God himſelf hath not appointed. For this is to add to the word of God, and to *Teach for Doctrines* the *Commandments* and Traditions of Men.

It is againſt the Commands of *Jeſus Chriſt* to *Stint the Spirit* in Prayer; which all thoſe that uſe a Form of Prayer, muſt neceſſarily do.

It is againſt the Commands of *Jeſus Chriſt* to uſe any *Significant Ceremony* in Religion: As for Inſtance, the *Croſs* in Baptiſm, for that is to make new Sacraments.

It is againſt the Commands of *Jeſus Chriſt* to *kneel at the Lords Supper*, for that is directly to contradict

our Saviours Example in his Institution of that Sacrament, and Savours besides of *Popish Idolatry*.

Since therefore there are these Sinful things in our Worship; and those too imposed as Terms of Communion; how can we blame them, if they withdraw themselves from us? Would we have them joyn with us in these Practices which they verily believe to be Sins? Where then was their Conscience? They might perhaps by this means shew how much they were *the Servants of Men*: But what would become of their Fidelity to *Jesus Christ*.

What now shall we say to this? They themselves are so well satisfi'd with their own doings in these matters, that they do not think they are in the least to be blamed for refusing us their Communion, so long as things stand thus with them. They are sure they herein follow their own Conscience; and therefore they cannot doubt but they are in a safe Condition; and may justifie their Proceedings to God, and to all the World; let us say what we please.

This is the Case. Now in Answer to it, we must grant them these two things.

First of all, that if indeed they be right in their Judgment; and those things which they except against in our Communion be really Unlawful, and Forbidden by *Jesus Christ*; then they are not at all to be blamed for their not Communicating with us. For in that Case, Separation is not a *Sin* but a *Duty*: We being for ever bound to *Obey God rather than Men*.

And Secondly, supposing they be mistaken in their Judgment, and think that to be unlawful, and Forbidden by God which is not really so: Yet so long as this perswasion continues (though it be a false one) we think they cannot without Sin joyn in our Communion.

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For even an Erroneous Conſcience (as we have ſhewed) binds thus far, that a Man cannot without Sin Act in Contradiction to it. Theſe two things I ſay we grant them, and let them make the beſt advantage of them.

But then this is the point we ſtand upon, and which if it be true, will render this whole Plea for Nonconformity upon account of Conſcience, as I have now opened it, wholly inſufficient, *viz.* If it ſhould prove that our Diſſenters are miſtaken in their Judgment; and that our Governours do indeed require nothing of them in the matter of Church Communion, but what they may comply with, without breach of Gods Law: Then I ſay it will not acquit them from being Guilty of Sin before God in withdrawing from our Communion; to ſay, that they really believed our Communion to be unlawful; and upon that Account they durſt not joyn with us.

It is not my Province here to Anſwer all their Objections againſt our Forms of Prayer, our Ceremonies, our Orders and Rules, in Adminiſtring Sacraments, and other things that concern our Communion: This hath been done ſeveral times; and of late by ſeveral Perſons which have treated of all theſe particular matters; and who have ſhewed with great clearneſs and ſtrength, that there is nothing required in our Church Appointments, which is in the leaſt inconſiſtent with, or Forbidden by any Law of *Jeſus Chriſt*: But on the contrary, the Eſtabliſhments of our Church, are for Gravity, Decency, Purity, and agreeableneſs with the Primitive Chriſtianity; the moſt approvable, and the leaſt Exceptionable of any Church Conſtitutions at this day in the World.

Theſe things therefore I meddle not with, but this is the point I am concerned in: Whether, ſuppoſing it be

every Mans Duty to joyn in Communion with the Eſtabliſhed Church; and there be nothing required in that Communion, but what may be Lawfully Practiſed? I ſay, ſuppoſing theſe two things; whether it will be ſufficient to acquit any Man from Sin, that withdraws from that Communion, upon this Account, that through his miſtake, he believes he cannot joyn with us without Sin? Or thus, whether will any mans perſwaſion that there are Sinful Terms required in our Communion (when yet there are not any) juſtifie his Separation from us.

This is the general Queſtion truly put; And this I give as the Anſwer to it: That in general ſpeaking a Mans Erroneous Perſwaſion doth not diſſolve the Obligation of Gods Law, or juſtifie any Mans Tranſgreſſion of his Duty. So that if Gods Law doth Command me to hold Communion with the Church where I have no juſt cauſe to break it: And I have no juſt cauſe to break it in this particular Caſe, but only I think I have: My miſperſwaſion in this matter doth not diſcharge me from my Obligation to keep the Communion of the Church; or acquit me from Sin before God if I break it.

The Truth and Reaſon of this I have fully ſhewed before, in what I have ſaid about the Authority of Conſcience. I ſhall now only by way of further Confirmation ask this Queſtion: Was St. *Paul* guilty of Sin or no, when he Perſecuted the Chriſtians; being verily perſwaded in his own mind that he ought ſo to do, and that he Sinned if he did not? If any will ſay that St. *Paul* did not Sin in this, becauſe he did but Act according to his Conſcience; they contradict his own expreſs words. For he acknowledgeth himſelf to be *the greateſt of Sinners*, and that for this very reaſon *becauſe he perſecuted the Church of Chriſt.* If they ſay

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that he did Sin in doing this: Then they muſt at the ſame time acknowledg, that a Mans perſwaſion that a thing is a Duty, will not excuſe him from guilt in practiſing it; if really and indeed it be againſt Gods Law: And on the other ſide, by the ſame reaſon, that a Mans perſwaſion that a thing is unlawful, will not excuſe him from guilt in not Practiſing it; if indeed Gods Law hath made it a Duty.

So that it infinitely concerns all our Diſſenting Brethren to conſider very well what they do, when they withdraw from our Communion. *Schiſm* undoubtedly is a great and crying Sin. A Sin, againſt which, there are as many hard things ſaid in the Diſcourſes of our Lord and his Apoſtles; and in the Writings of the Ancient Chriſtians; as againſt any other Sin whatſoever. And therefore let thoſe that forſake our Communion; and ſet up, or joyn with other Aſſemblies in Oppoſition to ours: I ſay, let them look to it that they be not involved in the Guilt of this dreadful Sin. They muſt be ſure that their Separation proceeds upon good grounds, if they would free themſelves from the imputation of it. It is not always enough to excuſe them; that they do believe there are Sinful Conditions impoſed in our Communion, and conſequently it is their Duty to withdraw. For unleſs the thing be ſo indeed; their believing ſo will not cancel their Obligation to our Church Communion; or make it ceaſe to be *Schiſm* to withdraw themſelves from it.

This may perhaps at the firſt hearing ſeem very ſtrange Doctrine to many, but yet it is true for all that; and will appear a little more Evident, if we put the Caſe in another inſtance, wherein we are not ſo nearly concerned.

Here is one of the *Roman-Catholick* perſwaſion,

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(as they call it,) that hath been trained up in Popery; and heartily believes it to be true Religion, and the Only one, wherein Salvation is to be had; and therefore in Obedience to the Laws and Customs of that Church, doth pay Religious Worship to Images; doth pray to Saints and Angels; doth give Divine Adoration to the Consecrated Bread in the Sacrament; as really believing it to be turned into the Body of Christ, to which his Soul, and Deity is personally United.

Is now such a Person as this Guilty of Idolatry in these Practices or is he not? He doth verily believe that he is not. He would abhor these Practices, if he did in the least believe, that God had Forbid them as Idolatrous. Nay he is so far from believing that they are Forbid, that on the contrary he hath been taught to believe that they are necessary Duties; and he cannot be a good Catholick, unless he thus Worship Images, and Saints, and the Bread of the Host. Well, now the point is, Whether such a Man, believing as he doth, be upon that Account acquitted from the Sin of Idolatry? We all grant, that if he had such clear Information about these things as we Protestants have; he would certainly be an *Idolater* if he should continue in these Practices: But whether his belief, and Opinion, and perswasion concerning these things, do not excuse him; and make that cease to be *Idolatry*, that would otherwise be so; This I say is the question. But yet none of us make any great question of it. For we do charge the *Papists* indiscriminately, with Idolatry in their Worship; notwithstanding their disclaiming it; notwithstanding their Profession to Worship God, no otherwise than according to his own Will; notwithstanding they do really take themselves Obliged in Conscience to give Divine Worship to the Consecrated

ſecrated Elements, and thoſe other Objects. And we charge them rightly in this. For if it *be really* Idolatry by Gods word, to do theſe things; then it will be Idolatry in any Man to do them, let his Opinion about them be what it Will. A Mans Ignorance, or miſtake, or falſe Opinion doth not alter the nature of things; it can neither make that ceaſe to be a Duty, which God hath Commanded, nor that ceaſe to be a Sin which God hath Forbidden. All that it will do, is, that according to the Nature and Circumſtances of it, it may more or leſs Extenuate the Tranſgreſſion that is committed upon the Account thereof.

And the Caſe is juſt the ſame in the matter before us. For any Man to withdraw his Communion from that Church, with which he ought, and with which he may Lawfully Communicate; That is as properly the Sin of *Schiſm*, as it is the Sin of *Idolatry* to give Divine Worſhip to that which is not God. For any Man, therefore, to break the Unity of the Church; though it be upon this very Account, that he doth believe it is his Duty ſo to do; or that he cannot Communicate with that Church without Sin: Yet if this perſwaſion of his be falſe, and Erroneous; he is no leſs a *Schiſmatick* for all this; than the other Man is an *Idolater* that thinks it his Duty to adore Images, and thoſe other undue Objects of Divine Worſhip among the *Romaniſts*. It is true, the Mans Ignorance or Miſperſwaſion will according to the greater or leſs *Culpability* of it; more or leſs excuſe the Mans Perſon before God, as it doth in the other Caſe. But it cannot in the leaſt make that which God hath made to be *Schiſm* to be no *Schiſm*; no more than in the other Caſe, it makes that to be no *Idolatry* which Gods word hath declared to be *Idolatry*.

Well now admitting all this; here comes the pinch of the thing. It will be ſaid, What, would you have a Man

Man do in this Case? He cannot conform with a safe Conscience; and yet he is a Transgressor if he do not. If he comply against his Conscience, you grant he is guilty of Sin in so doing: If he doth not Comply; then you say he is a *Schismatick*; and so is a Sinner upon that Account. Why to this I say, that both these things are often true; and here is that *Dilemma*, which Men by Suffering their minds to be abused with Evil Principles, and Perswasions, do frequently run themselves into. They are reduced to that Extremity that they can neither Act, nor forbear Acting: They can neither Obey, nor Disobey without Sin.

But what is to be done in this Case? I know nothing but this: That all Imaginable Care is to be taken that the Error and false Principles which misled the Man be deposed; and that his Judgment be better informed; and then he may both do his Duty which Gods Law requireth of him, and avoid Sinning against his Conscience.

But how is this to be done? Why no other way, but by using Conscientiously all those means which common Prudence will Recommend to a Man, for the gaining Instruction and Information to himself about any point that he desires throughly to understand, That is to say, Freeing his Mind from all Pride, and Passion, and Interest, and all other carnal Prepossessions; and applying himself seriously and impartially to the getting right Notions and Sentiments about his Duty in these matters: Considering without prejudice what can be said on both sides: Calling in the best assistance of the ablest and wisest Men that he can come by: And above all things seriously endeavouring to understand the Nature and Spirit of the *Christian* Religion; and to practice all that he is undoubtedly convinced

vinced to be his Duty: And for the matters in queſtion, moſt earneſtly imploring the Aſſiſtance of Gods Spirit to guide and direct him.

Well, but ſuppoſing a Man has endeavoured to inform his Judgment as well as he can, and hath uſed all thoſe Prudent means that were in his Power, to ſatisfie himſelf of the Lawfulneſs of our Communion; But yet after all, he is of the ſame perſwaſion that he was, *viz.* That he cannot joyn in our Worſhip without Sin: what will we ſay to ſuch a Man as this? Will we ſtill ſay that this Man muſt either Conform, though againſt his Conſcience; or he is a *Schiſmatick* before God? This is the great difficulty, and I have two things to ſay to it.

In the firſt place, we do heartily wiſh that this was the Caſe of all, or of the moſt of our Diſſenters, (*viz.* that they had done what they can, to ſatisfie themſelves about our Communion.) For if it was, I do verily perſwade my ſelf that there would preſently be an end of all thoſe much to be lamented *Schiſms*, and *Diviſions*, which do now give ſo much Scandal to all good Men, and threaten the Ruin of our Reformed Religion; And this poor Church of *England*, which hath ſo long Laboured and Groaned, under the furious Attacques that have been made upon her, by Enemies without, and Enemies within her own Bowels, would in a little time, be perfectly ſet free from all apprehenſion of Danger, at the leaſt from the one ſort of her Adverſaries.

If all our Brethren of the Separation would moſt ſeriouſly *follow after the things that make for Peace*, and *walk by the ſame Rule* as far as they were able, and in things *where they were otherwiſe minded*, would Religiouſly apply themſelves to God for direction; and to the uſe of Prudent means for Satisfaction: I doubt

not but the Face of things would presently be changed among us; and we should hear no more of any Division or *Schism* in our Nation, that was either dangerous to the Church, or to the Salvation of the Men that were concerned in it.

But alas, we fear we have too great reason to say, that the generality of our Dissenting Brethren, even those of them that Plead Conscience for their Separation; have not done their Duty in this matter; have not heartily endeavoured to satisfie their Minds about the Lawfulness of *Conformity* in those Points which they stick at.

If they had; one would think that after all their endeavours they should, before they pronounced *Conformity* to be unlawful, be able to produce some one plain Text of Scripture for the proving it so, either in the whole or in any part of it; but this they are not able to do. They do indeed produce some Texts of Scripture which they think do make for them: But really they are such, that if they had not supinely taken up their meaning upon trust; but would have been at the pains of carefully examining them; and using such helps as they have every where at hand for the understanding them: It would have been somewhat difficult for them, to have expounded those Texts in such a sense as would infer the unlawfulness of our Communion.

But further I say, it is not probable that the generality of our Dissenters, who condemn our Communion as unlawful, have ever anxiously applied themselves to the considering the Point, or gaining Satisfaction about it; because they do not seem to have much consulted their own Teachers in this affair, and much less those of our way. If they had, they would have been disposed to think better of our Communion; than they do: For not to mention what the Churchmen do teach & press in this matter; the most Eminent of their own Ministers, are ready thus far to give their Testimony

ſtimony to our Communion. That there is nothing required in it, but what a *Lay-Perſon* may Honeſtly and Lawfully comply with; though there may be ſome things inconvenient, and which they wiſh were amended. Nay they themſelves are ready upon occaſion to afford us their Company, in all the inſtances of *Lay-Communion*.

But I deſire not to enlarge upon this Argument, becauſe it is an Invidious one. All that I ſay is, that we wiſh it was not too apparent by many Evidences, that moſt of thoſe who ſeparate from us, are ſo far from having done all they can to bring themſelves to a compliance with our Church Conſtitutions; that they have done little or nothing at all towards it: But have taken up their Opinions, hand over head, without much thinking or enquiring; and having once taken up an Opinion, they adhere to it, without ſcarce ſo much as once thinking, that it is poſſible for them to be in the wrong.

If you ſpeak of a Man that may with reaſon be ſaid to have done his endeavour to ſatisfie himſelf about the Points of his Duty in this matter: Give us ſuch a one; as hath no end, no intereſt to ſerve by his Religion, but only to Pleaſe God, and to go to Heaven; and who in the choice of the way that leads thither, hath the Indifference of a Traveller; to whom it is all one, whether his way light on the right Hand, or on the left; being only concerned that it be the way which leads to his Journeys end.

Give us a Man, that concerns himſelf as little as you pleaſe, in the Speculative Diſputes, and Controverſies of Religion: But yet is wonderfully Solicitous about the Practice of his Duty; and therefore will refuſe no pains or trouble that may give him a right underſtanding of that.

Give us a Man, that in the midſt of the great Heats, and Diviſions, and different Communions of

the Church; is yet modeſt, and humble, and docible: That believes he may be miſtaken, and that his private Friends may be miſtaken too, and hath ſuch an Eſteem and Reverence for the Wiſdom of his Governours in Church or State; as to admit that it is probable they may ſee farther into matters of State and Religion, than he doth: And that therefore every Tenent, and Opinion that was inbibed in his Education; that was infuſed by private Men of his acquaintance; or that was eſpouſed upon a very few thoughts, and little Conſideration; ought not to be ſo ſtifly maintained; as to control, or to be ſet in Oppoſition to the Publick Eſtabliſhments of Authority.

Laſtly, give us a Man, that where the Publick Laws do run counter to his private Sentiments; and he is at a loſs to reconcile his Duty to Men, with his Duty to God: Yet doth not preſently upon this, ſet up a Flag of Defiance to Authority; but rather applies himſelf with all the Indifference, and Honeſty he can, to get a true Information of theſe matters: And to that end he Prays to God continually for his aſſiſtance, he calls in the beſt helps, and conſults the beſt guides he can; his Ears are open to what both ſides can ſay for themſelves; and he is as willing to read a Book which is writ againſt his Opinion, as one that defends it: In a word if he be prejudiced, or biaſſed any way; it is on the ſide of Authority; being rather deſirous to find himſelf miſtaken, and his Governours in the Right; than himſelf in the Right, and his Governours miſtaken. I ſay ſhew us ſuch a Man as this; and we readily grant, you have produced a Perſon, that doth ſincerely uſe his endeavours to ſatisfie himſelf about the Lawfulneſs of our Communion. But then we muſt ſay this alſo; that as the Caſe ſtands between the Church of *England*, and the Diſſenters; we

we can hardly believe, that such a Man will long continue in Separation from the Church; but will in a little time gain the Satisfaction of seeing, not only that he may Lawfully joyn with us, but also that it is his Duty so to do.

But let us admit, that a Man may have endeavoured to Inform his Judgment as well as he can; and yet be so far from being convinced that it is his Duty to joyn with us in our Worship; that he is still of Opinion that it is his Duty to separate from us: What will we say of such a Man? Will we still brand him for a *Schismatick*, notwithstanding he hath done all he can, to bring himself over to us; but cannot?

To this I answer in the second Place, according to the Principles I have before laid down, that if such a Case do ever happen; though the Man cannot be excused from *Schism*, as to the *matter* of it (because wherever there is an Actual Separation from a Church, with which we ought, and with which we may, Lawfully Communicate; there is an Actual Schism Commenced; let the pretence for the Separation be what it will:) yet I trust he shall not be charged before God, with the *Formal* guilt of the *Schism*; any farther than the *Error* that led him into it, was contracted by his own fault.

Though *Schism* in it self (as we have said) be a great Sin: yet we do not say that all those who are engaged in the same *Schism*, are *equally* Guilty before God.

In the first place, those that separate from the Church, to serve any private secular turn; these are most horribly guilty of *Schism*, and there is nothing to be said in their excuse.

In the second Place, those who separate from the Church, through misperswasions, and mistakes of Judg-

Judgment, which they groundlesly, and foolishly took up; and might have avoided; and would yet still certainly correct in themselves, if they were but so Careful, and Conscientious about their Duty as they ought to be: These Men, have indeed far more to say for themselves, than the former; but yet they are very blameable, and are bound as they Love their Souls, to take more Care of Informing their Conscience aright; that so they may leave that Sin they are engaged in.

But Thirdly, those that separate from the Church of God, because they know no better, nor never had means to know better: Or those that have sincerely endeavoured to understand their Duty as much as could be expected from one in their Circumstances; yet through weakness of understanding, or want of Opportunity, light into wrong Paths: In a word, those that are unhappily engaged in a *Schism*; but God Almighty who searcheth the Hearts, knoweth, that it is not through the Fault of their Wills, but the misfortune of their Circumstances: I say, if there be any Man among us that is in this Condition; though he be a *Schismatick Materially*; yet he is *Innocently*, at least, *Pitiably* so. And if he be as free from blame in the other parts of his Life; he may be a good Christian for all that. And God Almighty we hope who Judgeth of Men by their inward Sincerity, and not by their outward Circumstances; will impute that *Schism* (which in others perhaps is a *wilful* Crime) to this Man, no otherwise then as a pure *Sin* of *Ignorance*, which shall not (upon a general Repentance for all Sins known and unknown,) be accounted for at the last day. Especially if this Innocently mistaken Man we speak of, do to the other Regularities of his Life, add a diligent Care in these four following Points.

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First, that he be not *Obſtinate*, and *Pertinacious* in his way, but that he keep his mind readily prepared and diſpoſed to receive any Conviction, which God by any Means or Inſtruments ſhall offer to him.

Secondly, That he Separate no farther from the Church, of which he ought to be a Member, than he needs muſt; but do chearfully comply with the Publick Laws, and Eſtabliſhments in all thoſe Inſtances, where he is Satisfied he may do it with a ſafe Conſcience.

Thirdly, that where he cannot give *Active* Obedience to the Laws; he do in thoſe Inſtances *Patiently*, and *Chriſtianly*, ſubmit to the Penalties, which thoſe Laws inflict: Neither exclaiming againſt his Governours, or the Magiſtrates, as Perſecutors; for enacting, or Executing thoſe Laws: Nor uſing any undue, Illegal means to get himſelf more eaſe and Liberty: But in all things behaving himſelf as a quiet and peaceable Subject to the Government he lives under.

And Fourthly, and laſtly, that he ſhew himſelf a good *Neighbour* as well as a good *Subject*; in avoiding all peeviſh and bitter Cenſures of thoſe that differ in Opinion, and perſwaſion from him; and Exerciſing Humanity, and Friendlineſs, and Charity to all his Fellow Chriſtians.

Whoſoever I ſay, of our Brethren, of the Separation make good theſe Points: That is to ſay, are in the firſt place, very ſincere in their endeavours, to inform their Conſcience aright in the matter of our Communion: And in the next place, when they cannot Satisfie their Conſcience about our way; do yet in their Diſſent from us, Obſerve the four Particulars I have now named: I ſhould be loth for my part to Cenſure them either as ill *Men*, or ill *Subjects*, or ill *Chriſtians*.

But then all that I have ſaid in this matter, doth no more

more justifie the Sin of *Schism*, or Extenuate the Hainousness of it in its own Nature; Than it would serve to justifie or Extenuate the Sin of Idolatry; if all that I have now said, was applied to the Case of an Ignorant, well meaning, devout Papist. For I do verily believe that what I have now represented by way of Apology for an innocent mistaken *Separatist*; will hold true, *mutatis mutandis*, in the Case of a deluded *Romanist*, who is invincibly, and without any fault of his, intangled in the Practice of their *Idolatries*. But I believe for all that, the Sin of *Idolatry* is in it self a most grievous Sin, and so I believe is the Sin of *Schism* and therefore notwithstanding all that may be said; concerning the Innocence, or Excuseableness of some Mens mistakes about these matters; yet nevertheless, it infinitely concerns every Person, to have a care how he be engaged, either in the one, or the other.

To come to a conclusion, that which I would most seriously press from what hath been said is this. It appears from the foregoing Discourse, how absolutely necessary it is; that every Man should endeavour to inform his Judgment aright in the matters that offend his Conscience; before he withdraw his Obedience from his Lawful Governours, and his Communion from those that Worship God in Publick under them. It appears likewise that it is not enough to justifie a Mans Separation; that this or the other thing in our Worship, is really against his Conscience; for he may be a great Sinner notwithstanding that, for leaving our Assemblies, if it should prove at last that he is mistaken in his Notions.

What therefore should every Dissenter among us do, that hath any regard to his Duty, and would preserve a good Conscience? I say, what is there that more concerns him to do? than presently to set about

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the true informing of his Judgment in the points where he is now dissatisfi'd; for Fear he be found to live in a grievous Sin all the time he Separates from us.

And therefore, let no Man, that Lives out of our Communion, satisfie himself with such frivolous pretences as these; That as for all the *Substantials* of Religion, the matters of *Faith* and *Good Life*, they do agree with us; and that as for the other matters which concern *Ceremonies* and *Discipline*; these are Nice, Controverted Points, Points disputed *pro* and *contra* amongst the Divines. And therefore why should they trouble their Heads about them; nay perhaps if they should, they have neither Abilities nor Opportunities to understand them.

It must be confessed that something of this is true; But yet it is nothing to their purpose. It is very well, that we all agree in the *Rule* of *Faith*, and *Manners*; and it would be happy if all the Christian World did so too: but still Schism is a dreadful Sin. And a Man may as certainly, without Repentance, be damned for that, as for being an *Heretick* in his *Opinion*, or a *Drunkard*, for instance, in his *Manners*. Sure I am, the Ancient Christian Fathers thought so.

It is true likewise, that the business of *Church Government* and *Discipline*, and other Points of *Ecclesiastical Constitution*, is a matter of Dispute, and Controversy among us. But who is it that made it so? The Church of *England*, without doubt, would have been very well pleased, if there had been no dust raised, no dispute or contentions moved in these matters; but that every Member would have done his Duty peaceably, and quietly in his Station. Or that if any Controversy had arose; it should have been debated among Learn-

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